# OtherHand

## Intermission

Upon reaching home at last, I sent out a few emails to some of the folks who had helped with the effort, filling in the details of what some of them had already heard. Unfortunately I was a bit naive in my trust of certain individuals, and some sensitive data eventually got leaked on to the Internet. Especially appalling to me was an image of Cornelia's bank card, with her picture, which I emailed to someone I trusted. Without my knowledge or approval he not only forwarded it on to others, he published it in a subscription newsletter. I found this breach of ethics and display of insensitivity to the victim's family's just stunning.

Fortunately it actually wasn't as bad as it could have been, but it made me pretty angry. There was a lot of press interest, but Inyo wasn't giving out our identification, so we had some shelter. I've already had my 15 minutes of fame in life, so I was quite enjoying keeping a low profile and avoiding the press. Beyond that, Les and I were asked not to reveal any details of the location, as everything was still out there and unprotected. Given the interest that was building, it was proving a challenge.

After a couple days of recovery, I started pondering what we had seen. Did we really find only Cornelia? If so, where were the others? The fact that we found two fluid containers with her made me think she was left there. If she had been on her own, or pushing forward, she would have dropped the empty containers as she moved. Factor in the available shade and the site's view of the saddle, and it suggested to me she was waiting for someone to return, someone who had continued south over the saddle.

But once over the saddle, where would they have gone? I knew that there was no military base visible in the valley to the south. There were only two possible manmade structures present for many miles: The old AT&T microwave relay tower and the Wingate Airfield, a

strafing target area consisting of junked aircraft on a scraped dirt, mock airstrip inside the China Lake NWC military boundaries. It seemed to make sense that if some of the group continued south, they would likely head for one of those objects. The AT&T tower was especially intriguing, about 11 miles southerly from the site of the remains. Could Egbert possibly have made it that far and dropped the missing sleeping bag in the road?

Pretty quickly there was word of an impending large evidence search to which RMRU would be invited. Somehow I ended up being the contact person and on November 11th, I got a call from Corporal Terry Waterbury of the Inyo County Sheriff's Office, who identified himself as the "search manager" for the upcoming effort. He began filling me in on the plan, which left me more than a little surprised.

The idea was to assemble upwards of 30 people in Butte Valley in just over a week and a half to do the search. I asked about air support and he told me he was at the mercy of the CHP, as they would provide a helicopter if available. "If available" ??? I further was informed that the helicopter was primarily for the insertion of cadaver dogs, as the Corporal seemed to be entertaining the idea the area was a potential homicide scene. I asked if the dogs were going to be flown out and was told no, they would have to hike out. I think I spent more than a little time trying to make it clear to Corporal Waterbury, who had never been in Anvil Canyon, just what sort of terrain the dogs would be facing. Somewhere along the way, he mentioned that each team might be responsible for carrying in their own water supplies!! This was a nuttier plan that what Les and I had just pulled off, and ours was fairly wacky. I'm afraid what I viewed as rising concern on my part due to my knowledge of the area was interpreted by Corporal Waterbury as general obnoxiousness on my part, and he grew more than a little testy. Really, I'm only rude to people I know well!

But the final stunning bit came at the very end of our conversation. When Les and I took Conny's day planner back to the DVNP HQ at Furnace Creek, we saw a pronounced folded piece of pink paper stuck in it. We thought it could be a note, but didn't want to risk any damage by trying to open it, so we let it be. But I was VERY interested in what it could be. As Corporal Waterbury seemed very familiar with the items recovered to date, I thought I'd slip it in as a final question. His rather gruff response, "I don't know anything about that, and if there was a note, it would be in German and we don't have anyone who speaks German" (I'm not exaggerating, that's precisely what he said to me). I now knew what sort of organization I was dealing with.

For reasons I still don't fully understand, the search planned for November 20-23 imploded and was postponed to December 4-6. I never heard from Corporal Waterbury again, but instead got a call from a from Deputy Tim Winkler of the Inyo Sheriff's office who seemed to have taken over the planning. Or at least was the guy at Inyo Sheriff's assigned to deal with me! In any event, the plans for the search had changed more than a little, and Winkler actually seemed interested in my comments, seeing as I had actually been there. Winkler was struggling with the logistics of such a search, given the remoteness of the area, it being within both a national park and a wilderness area (whose managers seriously frowned on helicopter operations in the absence of immediate human welfare issues) and the difficulty of justifying the expense of helicopters without lives being in immediate jeopardy (i.e., "no helicopters for bones"). The latter point is not unreasonable for a cash-strapped county such as Inyo, but helicopters were really the only way to reasonably get searchers into the area.

I had a couple of telephone conversations with Winkler and knew that he was also interested in the area southerly of where the remains had been found, so any searching would likely include some of that area. However I had concerns, as the China Lake military boundary, only 4 miles or so southerly of the remains, seemed like an impenetrable wall to civilian searchers and was off limits. Add to that I was not nearly as familiar with that area as I would like. Can you say, "Road trip"?

On November 21st, since the big search had been postponed, Jeri and I decided to do a day hike to the AT&T relay tower to check out its visibility. I wanted to see if someone heading south from where the remains were found could see the tower and perhaps be attracted to it. We also wanted to hike to the Epsom Salt Works, which while still in DVNP, would give a good view to the north, across the China Lake property, to the south slopes of the area of the remains.

It's a long, remote drive in to the relay tower, about 41 miles from leaving the pavement. We found the facility in worse shape than our previous visit in 1996. I noticed from a sign on the fence that the facility is no longer owned by AT&T but rather American Tower. This time the gate was open and vandals had been taking their toll on the building, and all the antenna feedlines to the horn antennas had been removed. On the plus side, this meant it was safe to go up the actual tower and check the sightlines.

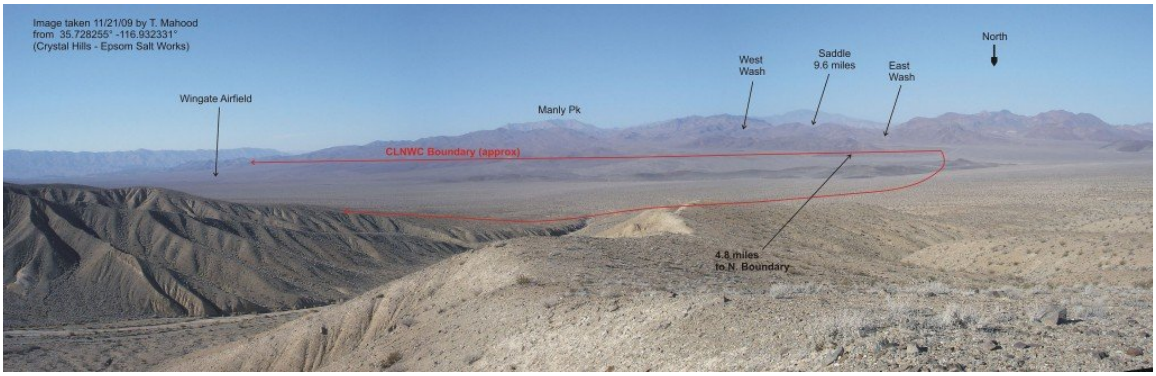
ATT microwave tower near Owl Mountains (T. Mahood)

I was very surprised to find there weren't any sightlines at all to the north! The tower was situated to provide some sort of east-west linkage, and the mountain range it was on blocked the view completely from the north. In order to catch a glimpse of the tower, someone would have to be far to the west at the Wingate Airfield to first see it. Further, there were no anti-collision lights on the tower, and didn't appear like there were any in 1996 either. It appeared impossible the tower could have been any sort of attraction to someone from the north.

Leaving the tower, we drove a couple miles back down the road to the trailhead for the Epsom Salt Works and started hiking in from there. The Salt Works was an operation from the 1920's that connected to Trona via a monorail system. As is usual for these sort of things, it never made much money and shut down after only a few years. It is part of DVNP and juts into the China Lake property for a couple of miles. There are no formal trails to it, but it's easy cross country travel as long as you heed the signs and don't cross on to the China Lake property. At this point we were only 10 miles south of the remains and the

entire southerly expanse from the remains was clearly visible. I took a lot of pictures and we called it a day. As we returned to our vehicle we hiked past the very spot where in August of 2009 a mother and son were trapped when they got lost in their 4wd, ending up driving off road and their vehicle stuck in a collapsed animal burrow. They were found after five days, but not before the six year old son succumbed to the heat. It was not lost on me how close this was to where the Germans perished, and how unforgiving an area it is.

The image below shows the view south, back toward the area Conny was found. The spot labeled "West Wash" is S1, the spot labeled "Saddle" is S2 (a point I had reached prior) and the spot labeled "East Wash" is S3. If Egbert continued south, this is the area he would have had to cross.




Looking southerly from near the Epsom Salt Works (T. Mahood)

Eventually the matter became moot. Around this time I heard again from Deputy Winkler. He had been doing a bit of investigation into the sleeping bag found on the AT&T tower road and turned up some new information. In speaking with the original investigator on the case, Winkler was able to roughly place a date as to when the bag was found. It appeared the bag was found and retrieved in the month of September, 1996. The road it was found on was typically patrolled by rangers at least once at week during that period. Had it been left by one of the Germans, it would have appeared there by the end of July, and thus would have been noticed during August patrols. Given this situation, and the lack of visibility of the AT&T tower to anyone from the north, it appeared unlikely the two incidents could be connected and the mysterious sleeping bag could be dismissed as a clue.

Next installment....

Or back to The Hunt for the Death Valley Germans